

THE LAWS OF RELAXATION

by Rabbi Berel Wein

In this week's parsha there appears a second rendition of the Ten Commandments. In this rendition there are slight variations of text from the first version that appears in parshat Yitro. All of these variations and nuances are adequately dealt with by the traditional Jewish commentators to the Torah over all of the centuries of Torah scholarship. I wish to deal here with one of these nuances as it concerns the great day of Shabat, the cornerstone of Jewish life and observance. In parshat Yitro the Torah commanded us "zachor" - remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Here in parshat Vaetchanan, the Torah tells us "shamor" - guard and observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Jewish tradition tells us that at Sinai, during the revelation of the Torah to Israel, God, so to speak, uttered the two words "zachor" and "shamor" simultaneously, a feat beyond human powers to comprehend, much less to accomplish. The obvious lesson is that there are two equal parts of the Sabbath - "zachor," the emotional, enjoyable, spiritual side of the holy day and "shamor," the legal, ritualistic observance of the commandments of the day regarding work. It is these two elements when applied simultaneously to the Sabbath day that make it a "taste of the world to come." The legal part alone would leave the day dry and sterile, unappealing and non-refreshing. The emotional part of the Sabbath would not be able to maintain the uniqueness of the day through all times and circumstances. This has been adequately and painfully demonstrated in our own time when permission to drive an automobile to the synagogue on Sabbath - a violation of "shamor" - ostensibly in order to preserve "zachor" - soon led to a complete disregard of the Sabbath by millions of Jews. It is the duality of Sabbath observance that makes it eternal and meaningful.

Justice Louis Brandies of the US Supreme Court had an uncle, Louis Dembitz, who was an observant Jew. Louis Brandies was an occasional guest at the Sabbath table of Louis Dembitz. Brandies wrote lovingly and longingly of the serenity and spirit that pervaded his uncle's home and table on the Sabbath. He wished for himself "such a day as well, but without the restrictions." Alas, without the restrictions - without "shamor" - there is no possibility to achieve the serenity he and all of us so craved and crave. "Shamor" is the key to unlock the door of peace, which is represented by "Zachor."

In parshat Yitro, the Sabbath is used as a tool to remember creation and the Creator. It thus has a seemingly universal character not restricted to Israel alone. However, in parshat Vaetchanan, it represents the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, an historical event unique to the Jewish people alone. Based on this latter interpretation of the Sabbath, the Talmud effectively excludes the non-Jewish world from observance of the Jewish Sabbath. The world has copied the Jewish idea of

a day of rest and leisure during the week. But that day - usually Sunday, in the Western world - does not come with the "zachor" and "shamor" duality attached to it. Therefore, the Jewish Sabbath remains unique from all other forms of days of leisure and rest. True is the oft-repeated statement that "more than the Jews guard the Sabbath, the Sabbath guards the Jews."

Shabat Shalom.

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